DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 508 CG 024 517

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TITLE Do the Leaders of Counselor Education Programs Think Graduate Students Should Be Required To Participate in Personal Counseling: The Results of a National Survey.
PUB DATE Sep 92
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Counseling; *Counselor Educators; *Counselor Training; *Degree Requirements; Emotional Problems; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Individual Counseling; Individual Development; Mental Disorders; Student Development

ABSTRACT

It is ironic to think that persons who experience substantial personal and interpersonal problems as a result of the stress in their own lives might end up providing mental health services to clients or be responsible for training graduate students to become professional counselors. Research by White and Franzoni (1990) substantiated the prevalent belief that many mental health professionals are emotionally damaged and have chosen their vocation to solve their own problems. It has been suggested that the rate of personal problems, which numerous researchers have noted to be manifested among many professional counselors and counselor educators, might be substantially reduced if counselor education programs implemented stricter admissions-retention policies and incorporated specific requirements intentionally designed to promote students' personal development. This study assessed what chairpersons and/or directors (N=122) of accredited counselor educator training programs thought about requiring all graduate students to participate in professional counseling as a programmatic requirement. Respondents were surveyed regarding characteristics of their programs, personal problems of students, and attitudes towards a policy requiring personal counseling. Minimal support was found for the notion that personal counseling should be a programmatic requirement for graduate students. Only 34% of the chairpersons supported the recommendation that problem students should be required to obtain professional counseling as a part of a remedial plan to enable them to continue in the program. (ABL)

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ED349508

Do The Leaders Of Counselor Education Programs Think Graduate Students Should Be Required To Participate In Personal Counseling: The Results Of A National Survey

By

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and

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Submitted to

ERIC Clearinghouse on

Counseling and Personnel Services

September 1992

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Abstract

The investigators present the results of a national survey designed to evaluate the degree to which department heads support a policy requiring students to participate in counseling during their training and discuss the implications of the study for counselor education.

Do The Leaders Of Counselor Education Programs Think Graduate Students Should Be Required To Participate In Personal Counseling: The Results Of A National Survey

The notion that counselors are not immune to the stresses of everyday life is not new. It is, however, ironic to think that persons who experience substantial personal and interpersonal problems as a result of the stress in their own lives might end up providing mental health services to clients in need of professional assistance or be responsible for training graduate students to become professional counselors.

Having had more than thirty years of experience in counselor education, first as masters students, then as doctorate candidates, and more recently as faculty members of an accredited graduate counseling program, the authors of this article are distressed with the level of personal problems they have noted many practitioners, counselor educators and counseling students exhibiting in their daily lives. These observations include recognition of numerous students, counselors and faculty members who have serious substance abuse problems, dysfunctional family relationships, sexual relationships with clients and students, exhibit poor interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and the tragic suicide recently of a prominent member of the profession.

Although these observations represent the experiences of the authors in various settings, they tend to be confirmed by a number of studies conducted over the past two decades related to the general mental health and well-being of professionals and students in the field. In this regard, several researchers have noted that individuals associated with the helping professions (e.g., psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors) were found to have significantly higher rates of depression, intense anxiety, and more personal relationship problems in comparison to individuals in the general population (Bermak, 1977; Deutsch, 1985; Looney, Harding, Blotcky, & Barnhart, 1980; Maeder, 1989; Miller, 1981; Thoreson, Budd, & Krauskop, 1986).

More recently, White and Franzoni (1990) conducted a multidimensional analysis of this topic and substantiated the "prevalent belief that many mental health professionals are emotionally damaged and have chosen their vocation to solve their own problems" (p.258). In another study, Stadler and Willing (1988) concluded that professional counselors were particularly at high risk for developing alcoholism, committing suicide, and to suffer from depression. Also, in an investigation involving 191 beginning graduate counseling students, a disproportionate number of these persons reportedly scored at significantly higher levels of psychological disturbance on a number of

variables than was found in the general populace (White & Franzoni, 1990).

Requiring Personal Counseling for Problem Students

Based upon the findings of their investigations, White and Franzoni (1990) suggested that counselor training programs should begin to find ways of identifying students with psychological problems and recommend that they receive personal counseling. Oftentimes, such a recommendation is made with the hope that problem students might be able to increase their self-awareness and sensitivity regarding the ways in which their interpersonal style impacts others. However, as Wise, Lowery, and Silverglade (1989) pointed out, while many counselor educators agree that personal counseling may have a positive effect on students, they are likely to be unclear about when this sort of recommendation should be made and exactly who should make it.

Additional problems about referring problem students for professional counseling have been reported by Olkin and Gaughen (1991). In discussing the results of a national survey among 100 chairpersons of masters counseling programs, the investigators listed several drawbacks mentioned by the respondents in terms of requiring personal counseling as part of a remediation plan for problem students. These included recognition that the counseling goals may be unclear or unrelated to the specific types of behavioral problems that are manifested by the student in the training program, time lines for achieving established

goals in counseling may be not well established, and because of the nature of confidentially in counseling, members of the training program would not have input nor be involved in the counseling process.

Although the researchers describe several limitations associated with the idea of requiring students to participate in counseling for remedial purposes, they concluded that counselor educators are generally too reactive in their approach to dealing with problem students and that recommend that they take more proactive steps in the future (Olkin & Gaughen, 1991). A logical extension to this recommendation leads one to raise the question whether all counseling students should be required to participate in personal counseling as a part of their professional training.

Should All Students Be Required to Participate in Personal Counseling

It is readily agreed that it is difficult to confront counselors and counselor educators about the types problems mentioned above because of their professional status and the psychological defenses that they often build around themselves. However, it is suggested that the rate of personal problems, which numerous researchers have noted to be manifested among many professional counselors and counselor educators, might be substantially reduced if counselor education programs implemented stricter admissions-retention policies and incorporated specific

requirements intentionally designed to promote students' personal development. In order to achieve this latter objective, counselor educators are strongly encouraged to consider requiring all graduate students to participate in personal counseling as a partial requirement for graduation.

There are numerous reasons for making this particular recommendation. First, it reflects our belief in the counseling process as a potent means of helping individuals realize their untapped human potential by becoming more aware of their daily behavior and its impact on others.

Second, this recommendation coincides with the guidelines presented by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (American Association for Counseling and Development, 1985) which assert the importance of providing opportunities for students to develop greater self-understanding through the use of counseling services during their training.

Third, requiring students who are experiencing personal problems that are likely to impede their ability to be effective helpers to participate in counseling while they are in training is considered an ethical responsibility of the faculty associated with all counseling training program. In discussing the ethics of counselor educators, Corey, Corey, and Callanan (1984) stress that faculty persons affiliated with professional counseling training programs have an obligation to develop strategies for dealing with

students whose personality factors are likely to interfere with their ability to function as effective counselors in the future.

Fourth, numerous studies involving mental health practitioners (Ford, 1963; Garfield & Kurtz, 1976; Hart, 1982; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Wise, Lowery, & Silverglade, 1989; Zaro, Barach, Nedelman, Dreiblatt, 1977) and counseling students (Hart, 1982; Kaslow, 1977) report that numerous personal and professional benefits often result from participating in professional counseling while one is in training. AS these investigators noted, these benefits included expanding students' understanding of the change process from the position of being a client, gaining self-awareness which often results in increasing one's ability to separate personal issues from client issues, and providing a highly effective opportunity to see another counselor in action (Wise, Lowery, & Silverglade, 1989).

Lastly, requiring all students to participate in personal counseling represents a useful preventive training strategy for a couple of reasons. First, such a policy provides psychologically intact students another outlet for personal and profession growth during their training. Second, implementing this requirement extends an important opportunity for those persons, who are more psychologically vulnerable as a result of various life stresses, to examine and confront personal difficulties before they become professional counselors.

Who supports a policy requiring students to participate in counseling during their training?

Upon reviewing the potential benefits mentioned above, it is not surprising to find that many mental health practitioners and graduate students endorse the recommendation of requiring personal counseling as part of one's professional training experiences. Norcross and Prochaska (1982) found 80% of practicing psychotherapists participating in their study indicated that having graduate students involved in personal counseling should be a prerequisite for all training programs.

Similar support was observed among counseling students who were polled regarding their views of incorporating such a policy in counselor education programs. Post Kammer and Davis (1986) reported more than 60% of the students in the counselor education program they surveyed expressed the belief that personal counseling should be a required part of their professional training experience. More recently, Fouad, Hains, and Davis (1990) reported similar results as 66% of the graduate students they studied indicated the view that counseling should be a required part of the preservice curriculum. These researchers pointed out, however, that while several studies have been directed towards assessing students' opinions about this issue in the past, little research has been directed towards investigating counselor educators' thoughts about requiring students to participate in personal counseling during their training.

The question of requiring all graduate students to formally participate in process of counseling prior to graduating with a professional degree has allegedly been a controversial one. Yet, a review of the research in this area reflects two interesting points. First, of the research that has been done, there is substantial and consistent support for this sort of curriculum requirement among graduate level counseling students and practitioners in the field. Second, to date, few investigations have been conducted to evaluate the degree to which counselor educators support this sort of programmatic requirement.

With these observations in mind, the present study was designed to extend previous research in this area. Specifically, the investigators were interested in assessing what the chairpersons and/or directors of accredited counselor education training programs in the United States thought about requiring all graduate students to participate in professional counseling as a programmatic requirement. What follows is a description of the research design, presentation of the findings, and a discussion of the relevance of the results of this study for counselor education.

Method

Procedures and Sample

The investigators targeted the chairpersons or program directors of those counseling programs listed in the Counselor Preparation, 1990 - 1992: Programs, Personnel, and

Trends (Hollis & Wantz, 1990) as having received APA, CACREP, and/or CORE accreditation by 1990 as possible participants in this study. Selection of this particular sample was purposeful in that the researchers specifically wanted to investigate responses by the chairpersons of those departments that are considered to exemplify model training programs for professional counselors. Consequently, only persons in leadership positions within those programs singled out as having met the professional standards for accreditation were included in the study.

A questionnaire designed for this research entitled, "The Student Development Survey: Form A" (SDS), was sent to individuals identified as either the chairperson or program director of 192 accredited graduate counseling programs in the United States. A cover letter, copy of the survey, and self-addressed stamped envelope was sent to all of these persons in April 1991. Written instructions were provided on all of the surveys that were mailed to the participants.

The instructions emphasized the importance for the respondents to not provide identifying information (e.g., the name of the person completing the survey or the institution which the respondent was affiliated) in order to guarantee the confidentiality of those persons completing the survey questions. To facilitate an increase in the number of persons responding to the survey two additional mailings were sent out in May and July 1991.

The first five survey questions solicited demographic information about the counseling programs in which the respondent was affiliated. Specifically, these questions helped the investigators determine whether the counseling program was associated with a private or public institution, the number of full-time and part-time (adjunct) faculty affiliated with each program, and the approximate number of full-time and part-time students admitted to the program during the past two years.

The remaining survey questions dealt with a variety of issues related to the number of students asked to leave the program for academic reasons, the number of students asked to leave because they manifested personal problems that were thought to likely interfere with their effectiveness as a professional counselor, the respondent's attitude towards a policy requiring all students to participate in personal counseling during their training, and ways of dealing with problem students.

Results

A total of 192 surveys were mailed to the chairpersons or directors of counselor education programs that matched the selection criteria mentioned earlier. One hundred twenty nine (129) persons responded to the SDS, however, 7 of the returned surveys were only partially completed and not included in the data analysis. This resulted in a final count of 122 completed surveys (a 62% return rate) from the total number of training programs contacted.

Most of the persons participating in this study (95) were associated with counseling programs in public institutions while the remaining 27 (22%) were located in private institutions. The number of full-time faculty in these programs ranged from 2 to 30 person (Mean = 9) and the number of part-time, adjunct faculty ranged from 3 to 50 instructors (Mean = 7).

In response to several questions related to the students in attendance at these graduate school programs, it was noted that the mean number of persons who had been accepted as full-time students in these counseling programs was calculated at 55 students over the past two years while 44 part-time students reportedly having been accepted into these programs during the same time period.

When asked, "In the last two years, approximately how many students have been requested to leave your program for academic reasons?", the responses ranged from 0 to 25 with a mean of 2 students over the past two years or 1 person per year. This contrasted sharply to the number of students "who were asked to leave the program because of personal (e.g., emotional/psychological/interpersonal) problems that would interfere with their effectiveness as a professional counselor" which ranged from 0 to 40 students with a Mean of 6 students over the past two years or 3 students annually.

In responding to the question which inquired whether "a formal policy should be established to address the issue of students who demonstrated personal problems during their

graduate training". Although 92 (76%) of the respondents indicated they agreed with this statement, 30 (24%) other department heads indicated that they did not think such a policy should be established in counselor education programs.

Other survey questions were designed to assess the degree to which the heads of accredited programs supported the idea of "recommending" or "requiring" all students to participate in personal counseling during their graduate training. In this regard, it was noted that 44 (34%) of the department heads said their programs did not "recommend students to participate in personal counseling during their training while 74 (56%) others indicated that their programs did recommend students to participate in counseling at some point in their training. Four persons (3%) did not respond to this survey item. Furthermore, only 12 (9%) of the respondents stated that their programs "required students to participate in personal counseling while they are graduate students", with 110 (84%) others stated their programs did not have such a requirement.

Finally, the participants were presented with several options in responding to the question, "What do you think is the best way to deal with students whose personal problems may interfere with their ability to provide effective counseling to others?" Upon analyzing the various responses to this question, we noted that 9 (7%) persons in the sample indicated that "once a student is admitted to a counseling

program there is really very little the faculty can do regarding this sort of situation"; 54 (44%) suggested that "the student should be encouraged to obtain personal counseling but I would not be supportive of a policy that required students to do this"; 42 (34%) agreed that "the student should be required to obtain professional counseling in order to continue in his/her studies; and only 17 (13%) said that "all students enrolled in counseling programs should be required to obtain personal counseling at some time during their professional training."

Discussion

The results of this study provide counselor educators with several important and disturbing findings. The authors suggest that the findings not only have implications for training policies but also give reason to pause to evaluate the purpose and purview of counselor education programs from a humanistic and developmental perspective.

First, the results of this research reflect minimal support among department heads for the notion that personal counseling should be a programmatic requirement for graduate counseling students. In this regard, only 17 (13%) of the chairpersons participating in this study stated support for such a requirement. From the researchers' perspective, it was distressing to find that while more than half of the respondents said their programs "recommended" students to consider becoming involved in personal counseling during their training, more than a third of the department heads

(34%) stated neither they nor the other members of the faculty made this type of recommendation to their students. Among all the department heads polled, although only 12 (9%) verified that a policy requiring trainees to participate in personal counseling was currently being implemented, the overwhelming majority (N = 110; 84%) reported no such policy existed in their programs.

Why are these findings important?

In light of the evidence generated from numerous investigations which were reviewed earlier in this article, it is clear that strong support exists among practitioners and graduate students for making participation in personal counseling a requirement at the preservice level of one's professional development. With this backdrop in mind, the results of the present study suggest that many of the present department heads of accredited professional counseling training programs in the United States are out of step with the expressed interests and needs of the consumers of these programs and practitioners in the field.

More distressing findings were also noted in the responses many of the department heads gave regarding what should be done for those students who demonstrated personal problems that were likely to interfere with their ability to provide effective counseling services in the future. While a majority of the respondents indicated agreement with the statement that "a formal policy should be established to address the issue of students who demonstrated such personal

problems," almost a quarter of the department heads surveyed (24%) reported that they did not think such a policy should be established in counselor education programs.

Exploring the issue of what to do with problem students further, it was surprising to note that only 42 (34%) of the chairpersons supported the recommendation that these students should be required to obtain professional counseling as part of a remedial plan for them to continue in the program. However, 54 (44%) of the respondents said they thought these students should be "encouraged" but not "required" to agree to such an action plan.

The investigators suggest that the type of attitude reflected by the department heads falling into the latter response category represents poor leadership regarding a very important professional issue. More specifically, it is argued that when heads of professional counseling training programs take a soft attitude such as "encouraging" but not insisting that problem students be required to participate in personal counseling in an attempt to facilitate their development, they are acting both irresponsibly and unethically in the context of their leadership position. Furthermore, the investigators hypothesize that it is precisely this type of attitude that contributes to students graduating from various counselor education programs with personal deficits intact which reinforces the "prevalent perception that many mental health professionals are emotionally damaged" (White & Franzoni, 1990; p.258).

Another disturbing finding emerging from the present study involves the responses of those chairpersons who indicated that "once a student is admitted to a counseling program there is really very little the faculty can do regarding this sort of situation" (i.e. in terms of addressing the personal problems some students demonstrate that are likely to interfere with their future effectiveness as professional counselors). Clearly, a minority of the total number of department heads completing the survey (N = 9; 7%) expressed this viewpoint. Nonetheless, it was surprising to find that any persons in leadership positions in the profession were willing to expresss a perspective that is antithetical to our fundamental purpose as professional counselors. That is, it is generally assumed that effective counselors are able to design strategies and create environments in which individuals are able to exercise their innate human right to development and change in positive ways. Thus, by expressing the belief that there is really little counselor educators can do to assist problem students to realize their personal potential, these department heads voice an opinion that reflects a sense of passivity, impotence, and helplessness which is inherently unhealthy for the profession.

A review of those empirical studies that investigated the level of competence of counselors, who themselves had participated in counseling during their training in comparison to practitioners who had not, reflects

contradictory findings by different researchers. For instance, Greenberg and Staller (1981) found no significant differences between these two groups of practitioners. However, more recent studies provide evidence indicating a positive relationship exists between the counselor's mental health, whether s/he participated in counseling during his/her training, and client outcome (Lambert & Bergin, 1983; Sexton & Whiston, 1991).

Upon considering these mixed findings as well as the results of the present study, we suggest that the time has come to move beyond debating whether having students participate in personal counseling as a part of their training might contribute to their professional effectiveness after graduating from counselor education programs. Instead, we wish to raise a broader question regarding our purpose as counselor educators. That is, do we really have an ethical responsibility to support and implement policies which are not only designed to stimulate trainees' professional competence but, more specifically implemented to intentionally stimulate graduate students' personal development? By raising this question we hope to not only promote interesting discussion among colleagues in counselor education, but more importantly, to stimulate support for an expansion in the ethics of counselor education.

Expanding the Ethics of Counselor Education:

A Call to Action

The call for an expansion in the ethics of counselor education is rooted in the belief that the type of training that is offered to persons interested in becoming professional counselors should not be divorced from intentional, well-planned, and measurable efforts to stimulate their personal development. As a profession that is fundamentally concerned about assisting others realize their human potential through the various types of services counselors are trained to offer, it is suggested that those training programs which do not have established policies and course requirements aimed at stimulating students' personal development, reflect a basic contradiction in purpose. In other words, while many counselor educators "talk the talk" regarding such broad and complex theoretical constructs as mental health, human development, self-esteem, and self-actualization, few actually "walk this talk" by incorporating training experiences designed to intentionally promote counseling students' personal growth and well-being.

In attempting to overcome this sort of contradiction, the authors developed a research-based, preservice training model for graduate students that is intentionally designed to promote their professional development, personal growth and psychological maturity in a variety of ways. Two of the components of this training model requires all newly admitted students to participate both in individual

counseling and as a member of a student support group as a part of an introductory counseling class (Daniels & D'Andrea, 1991).

Certainly, many counselor educators are likely to incorporate various learning activities into the courses they teach in an effort to promote students' development. However, while it is not suggested that requiring individuals to participate in professional counseling during their training is a panacea for promoting the personal development of all students, our initial research findings regarding the personal effects of establishing requirements such as those mentioned above among new graduate students has been very positive (Daniels & D'Andrea, 1992).

By advocating for the inclusion of training strategies designed to stimulate students' personal development, it is hoped that more counselor educators will begin to take into account a myriad of questions which, if addressed at the preservice level, will reflect both an expansion in our sense of purpose and contribute to the personal and professional well-being of the future generation of counselors. A partial list of some of the different types of questions counselor educators are encouraged to consider in thinking about the importance of expanding the ethics of their work include the following.

a. Do students who graduate from our programs feel better about themselves than when they started the program?

b. Do students have a clearer sense of personal and professional purpose as they progress through their training?

c. Do counselors gain a sense of personal empowerment that they can and will make a difference in stimulating client and systemic changes as a result their training experiences?

d. Do our training programs help to humanize students by creating and requiring participation in training experiences that facilitate the realization of their personal and professional potential?

Finally, in reporting the results of a national survey designed to assess the level of support for requiring students to participate in counseling as a part of their graduate training two purposes were served. First, in comparing the present findings with past research efforts, it is concluded that the department heads of many counseling programs are currently out-of-step with the interests and recommendations of a majority of counseling students and mental health practitioners.

Second, in comparing the results of this study with the reports of other researchers in the field, the authors advocate for an expansion in the purpose and ethics of counselor education. This recommendation is based upon the proposition that the nature of our work necessarily demands that counselor educators be responsible for promoting students' personal as well and as much as their professional

development. In agreeing to this expanded ethical commitment, counselor educators are encouraged to consider the feasibility of requiring students to participate in various kinds of activities such as individual counseling, support groups, student advisory committees, keeping personal journals throughout their training, and creating other innovative personal development experiences within the context of their training programs.

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